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## Things Are Changing. Fast.

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### Abstract (summary)

Despite the funding challenges nearly all school libraries face, many media specialists are optimistic about the role of technology in the school library, according to SLJ's 2011 Technology Survey. Maribel Castro, a high school librarian, in Lubbock, TX, spoke for many school librarians when she wrote that even though her library is behind the tech curve, she still feels that we are at the cusp of great things. But in spite of the general optimism, others point to some significant obstacles: technological innovations are often hampered by poor funding, lack of time, and unsupportive administrators. I feel like I am blocked by my district at nearly every turn, says an Oklahoma elementary school librarian. Most of the excitement about the future stems from the emergence of ebooks and mobile devices.

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### Full Text

#### Things Are Changing. Fast.

Despite the funding challenges nearly all school libraries face, many media specialists are optimistic about the role of technology in the school library, according to *SLJ*'s 2011 Technology Survey. Maribel Castro, a high school librarian, in Lubbock, TX, spoke for many school librarians when she wrote that even though her library is behind the tech curve, she still feels that "we are at the cusp of great things."

But in spite of the general optimism, others point to some significant obstacles: technological innovations are often hampered by poor funding, lack of time, and unsupportive administrators. "I feel like I am blocked by my district at nearly every turn," says an Oklahoma elementary school librarian.

Most of the excitement about the future stems from the emergence of ebooks and mobile devices. Combine these hot developments with dynamo media specialists who see themselves as their school or district tech leaders, and we may well be on the verge of a new era--at least for some schools. (For more on our survey, see "Not Just the Lucky Ones," p. 9.)

#### Ebooks: we're investigating

The number of ebooks in school libraries is growing, with almost a third (31 percent) of respondents saying they now have them in their collections. Last year alone, K-12 school libraries nationwide spent an average of \$939 each on digital books, ranging from a low of \$390 at the elementary school level to \$1,749 in high schools. During the coming two years, an additional 28 percent of libraries expect to add ebooks, while 43 percent say they may consider adding them to their collections (see chart 3-B, p. 31). Does ebook acceptance vary by region? A whopping 78 percent of school librarians in the Northeast that are currently without ebooks say they definitely plan to purchase them during the next two years.

While 63 percent of those surveyed say that they can't afford to buy digital books, the biggest obstacle to ebook acquisition is libraries' lack of digital devices (67 percent, see chart 3-C, p. 31). Digital rights management is more of an issue for high school librarians (31 percent) and for librarians under age 35 (36 percent).

Competing platforms are another major hurdle. "Right now I have too many separate ways to access our ebooks:

ABC-CLIO, Gale, Follett Shelf," says Julie Wales of McNair Magnet School, a middle school in Rockledge, FL. Survey respondents report that the array of ereaders is also daunting, vendor practices aren't school friendly, and there are myriad administrative obstacles. "I cannot get Kindles because of Amazon's cash-only business practice--no POs" writes Janet Kenney of Bristol Eastern High School in Connecticut.

While ebooks remain a source of confusion and curiosity for many librarians, others report that they're launching ebook pilot projects with circulating Kindle or Nook devices. "With regards to ebooks, I think they are a huge part of the future of libraries... and I'm not scared of ebooks, I welcome them and will work to incorporate them into my library when I am able," writes an elementary school librarian from Albany, NY. And if they don't already have ebook programs in place, librarians often report that they're in the process of negotiating with ebook vendors or applying for grant funding.

Probably the most startling fact about ebooks is where libraries expect to be in five years (see chart 3-A, p. 31). School libraries predict ebook penetration to increase 14-fold by 2016, to 7.8 percent. To get there, libraries will need to shift a significant portion of their print budgets to the purchase of digital books.

### **Mobile devices: Turned off, put away?**

About one-third of all K-12 students have a smartphone, iPod touch, iPad, tablet, or some other personal mobile device (see chart 2-A, this page). Not surprisingly, the number rises with the grade level. The biggest divide is between public schools and private schools, where up to one-half of the kids have a mobile device. In public schools, that fraction drops to one-third.

While only 13 percent of students nationwide are allowed to use their mobile devices in school (chart 2-B, p. 30), mobile usage, at least in the opinion of librarians, is a lot more nuanced--and contentious. Questions about mobile usage drew a wealth of anecdotal responses: "But some teachers including me do it anyway." "They can use them for 'educational' purposes." "Unfortunately not for academic purposes." "We are behind on this one I think. So sad."

Many of those who contributed comments believe that a ban on mobile devices is difficult--if not impossible--to enforce, while others think that a no-cellphone rule in schools would only result in students missing out on "a huge educational opportunity."

### **Leaders in school, district**

Overall, almost two-thirds of respondents (65 percent, chart 4-B, p. 33) consider themselves tech leaders in their school or district. But there's a generation gap. Only 57 percent of those over age 55 rate themselves as leaders, compared to 74 percent of those under 35.

In addition to the 84 percent that provide some instruction to the faculty, 62 percent of school librarians are also involved in planning their school's technology resources (chart 4-C, p. 33), with librarians in rural districts more involved in district planning. On a hopeful note, nearly 90 percent of those surveyed (see chart 4-D, p. 33) say they're responsible for recommending or purchasing technology for their school or district.

### **Sidebar**

#### **1. Tools and Content**

A. Which of the following tools do you use in your library? And which tools that you are *not* currently using does your LMC plan to use within the next year?

Currently using      Plan to use

Video equipment 74% 10%

Photography equipment 68% 9%

Digital subscriptions 54% 8%

Interactive whiteboards 51% 15%

Other web-based tools 45% 9%  
 Free digital resources 42% 7%  
 Blogs 35% 33%  
 Ebooks 31% 43%  
 Wikis 31% 29%  
 Games 29% 7%  
 Open source technology 28% 11%  
 1-to-1 computing 21% 12%  
 Online communities 19% 12%  
 Social applications 14% 12%  
 Mobile devices 12% 24%  
 Apps 11% 14%  
 Tablets (e.g., iPad) 10% 32%  
 Ereading devices 9% 42%  
 Other 4% 2%  
 None of the above 3% 2%

**B. If you had to run a school library on a desert island (with electricity), what would be the one digital product you would need to have? (Google doesn't count!)**

**C. Percentage of libraries that spent money on the following technologies in past year, and average amount spent.**

Ebooks Subscription databases Web-based services Video streaming Interactive whiteboards Computers and other equipment

Percentage of libraries that purchased products 29% 61% 43% 27% 39% 63%  
 Average dollars spent Elementary school \$390 \$1,457 \$1,659 \$1,138 \$10,196 \$12,320  
 Middle school/Jr. high school \$773 \$3,003 \$1,838 \$1,158 \$18,712 \$9,997  
 High school \$1,749 \$7,026 \$2,373 \$3,351 \$26,176 \$22,069  
 Percentage of districts that purchased products 52% 77% 63% 47% 75% 84%  
 Average dollars spent at district level \$6,133 \$13,048 \$21,144 \$9,650 \$184,167 \$539,262

Top 10 responses

**D. What technology do you use with students?**

Technology used with students Total schools Elementary school Middle/Jr. high High school

Desktop software **89%** 86% 94% 97%  
 Digital photography & video **65%** 65% 66% 63%  
 Web-based tools (e.g., blogs, wikis) **56%** 53% 67% 71%  
 Interactive whiteboards **53%** 55% 53% 49%  
 Online office applications (e.g., Google docs) **50%** 42% 55% 72%  
 Podcasting & audio **29%** 27% 39% 34%  
 Social applications (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) **6%** 3% 7% 18%  
 Other **12%** 12% 14% 10%  
 None of the above **3%** 4% 2% 2%

**E. Laura Librarian**

How do you use social applications to support teaching and learning in your school?

2. Going Mobile

**A. What percentage of the student body would you estimate currently has a personal mobile device**

(e.g., smart phone, iPod Touch, iPad or other tablet)?

**B. Are students allowed to use personal mobile devices during school hours?**

**C. Which mobile devices are currently used in your school by one or more classes for any type of instruction?**

Mobile devices Total schools Elementary school Middle/Jr. high High school Public schools Private schools

NET use any **35%** 35% 33% 39% 34% 41%

iPods 17% 19% 20% 16% 20% 9%

iPads or other tablet **17%** 17% 15% 18% 15% 26%

Smartphones **3%** 2% 4% 10% 3% 5%

Other **11%** 10% 12% 14% 11% 13%

Not used for instruction **65%** 65% 67% 61% 66% 59%

The 11% who indicated "other" use laptops, netbooks, ereaders, MP3 players, etc.

Private schools use iPads or other tablets more than public schools.

3. Ebooks

**A. Ebooks present and future.**

**B. What are your plans for library ebook purchases in the next two years?**

**C. What are the biggest obstacles to ebook implementation in your library?**

**D. How do you see ebooks impacting teaching and learning in your school or district?**

**E. What device(s) do you and your library users most often use to read ebooks?**

Devices Total schools Public schools Private schools

Library computer 66% 68% 61%

Personal laptops/desktop/netbook 51% 49% 59%

Dedicated ebook reader 30% 25% 48%

Other mobile device (e.g., iPad, smartphone) 19% 15% 36%

Other 4% 5% 1%

Don't know 7% 6% 11%

4. Leadership

**A. Do you train teachers to do any of the following?**

**B. Are you viewed as a technology leader in your school or district?**

**C. In which of the following ways are you involved in technology resources planning?**

**D. Are you responsible for purchasing or recommending any of the following technologies for your school and/or district?**

**E. What is the biggest challenge to incorporating technology into your school or library? (open-ended question)**

#### **Sidebar**

About this survey

The survey was emailed to *SLJ*'s print and enewsletter subscribers in February; the email encouraged recipients to share the survey link with others. The survey was also advertised in enewsletters, on *SLJ*'s website, and

through social networks. A drawing to win a free iPad was offered as an incentive. The survey closed in March with 1,187 U.S. school librarians responding. Data was weighted to better represent the breakdown of elementary school, middle school, and high school libraries and by percent breakdown for public vs. private schools. All research and data tabulation was conducted in-house.

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